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When a Man Shops for Shirts

A radio interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, broadcast Tuesday, January 23, 1940, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 91 associated radio stations.

WALLACE KADDERLY:

Here we are in Washington here, too, is Ruth Van Deman, with another fresh-baked batch of news from the Bureau of Home Economics.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Printed not baked this "batch" is today, Wallace. I can see you are still thinking about baked apples and roast pork from last Tuesday.

KADDERLY:

They were tantalizing to talk about on an empty stomach. And I suppose the requests are still coming in for that recipe on spareribs with apple stuffings.

VAN DEMAN:

The girls in the mail room are certainly pork and apple conscious.

But, Wallace, we'll give your hunger pangs a rest today. Let's talk about something to wear instead of things to eat. Allow me to present to the men and boys of the Farm and Home Hour.....

KADDERLY:

What! Another new bulletin! Unless I need new glasses, this title looks to me like "Cotton Shirts for Men and Boys."

VAN DEMAN:

What's so surprising about that?

KADDERLY:

Well, I knew that the Bureau of Home Economics studied dress fabrics and various things about women's and children's clothes, but.....

VAN DEMAN:

But, you though we's neglected the men. Don't you ever think that! We've had a project running for several years now on fabrics for men's shirts attempting for one thing, to establish just what is cotton broadcloth. There's been a great deal of misunderstanding about what broadcloth really is.

KADDERLY:

I've seen the label, "Genuine broadcloth."

VAN DEMAN:

But was it genuine?

KADDERLY:

I don't know.

VAN DEMAN:

That's been the trouble. Nobody had worked out a real definition.

KADDERLY:

The "broadcloth" label does seem to cover very different looking fabrics. I've noticed that many times.

VAN DEMAN:

Maybe some of that difficulty will iron itself out now. We hope so.

Anyway, as the result of the work in our textile laboratories, the American Society for Testing Materials has set up tentative specifications for cotton broadcloth.

KADDERLY:

Research like that must be very helpful to the manufacturer who wants to label his goods right, as well as to the retailer and the consumer.

As we've been talking here, I've been leafing through this bulletin. I didn't know there was so much to say about shirts.

VAN DEMAN:

Margaret Smith's done a master job, we think. Her name's there in the place of honor, you'll notice, as author.

KADDERLY:

And I see she has an eye for pictures too. These are so clear. These little sketches, for instance, with the different styles of collars, and cuffs, and sleeves pieced, and sleeves whole.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, she took in all the fine points of design and workmanship, as well as materials everything from the cloth, to the buttons, to the thread in the buttonholes.

But, Wallace, if you don't mind getting down to personal cases, what do you look for first when you go to buy shirts?

KADDERLY:

Now, Ruth, you're not going to hold me up as a shining example of an intelligent shopper.

VAN DEMAN:

We'll make it "off the record."

KADDERLY:

Well, here goes then -- For one thing I find it pays me to buy a pretty good quality of shirt. That kind of a shirt feels better it's fuller it fits better wears better.

VAN DEMAN:

Pays better in the end.

KADDERLY:

That's the way I figure it, anyway.

One thing in a shirt I really am fussy about. That's the collar. It has to be well cut, so it'll fit-up well around the neck.

VAN DEMAN:

You take a fairly high collar.

KADDERLY:

That's because of my long neck, I guess. I don't want one of these low collars that gets hooked under my Adam's apple.

And working at a desk as much as I do, moving my head up and down, I want a collar that doesn't get all rumped up.

VAN DEMAN:

Probably with the collars that look right and feel right, if you look at the inside of the neck band, you'll see several rows of machine stitching. Quilting, they call it, in the trade. That stitching holds the neck band firm and keeps it from crushing down.

Do you ever have trouble with the neck bands shrinking?

KADDERLY:

Not since these new shrinkage processes went into effect. I try to read the label very carefully. I buy shirts that say "full shrunk" or "shrinkage not more than one percent" or whatever the percentage is.

The Federal Trade Commission has some very definite rules about how those shrinkage labels can be used, so there won't be any misunderstanding on the part of the public.

VAN DEMAN:

And you must look for color-fast labels too. Your shirts never look faded.

KADDERLY:

I hope not. On this color-fast question, I do try to pick "vat dyed" material or these colored stripes that are woven right in.

VAN DEMAN:

Striped madras, yes, that's dyed in the yarn. And I see you choose the smooth kind, that doesn't have a fancy little figure with long yarns or "floats", on the surface to snag or wear out first.

KADDERLY:

Maybe that's because I like plain things best.

VAN DEMAN:

What about cuffs? I notice you're wearing the barrel style.

KADDERLY:

It just happens so today. I really like a French cuff better. I find I get longer service from the fold-back cuff.

VAN DEMAN:

You mean they can be ripped off and reversed when they fray.

KADDERLY:

That's it. Fraying at the cuffs is the first place my shirts begin to wear out. And I always check on the sleeve length.

VAN DEMAN:

Does somebody stretch a tape line from the middle of your shoulders to your wrist? You seem to get the sleeves plenty long.

KADDERLY:

I have had that measure taken enough times. I know now. I have to have a 34 sleeve. I never buy a shirt unless I'm sure of the sleeve length.

VAN DEMAN:

And the neck size?

KADDERLY:

15:

VAN DEMAN:

That means there's a stamp in the neck band 15 4, with a space between the 15 and the 4.

KADDERLY:

You seem to know all about this.

VAN DEMAN:

I learned it from this new bulletin.

KADDERLY:

Well, Farm and Home friends, if any of you would like to "learn" about "cotton shirts for men and boys" from this new bulletin, just drop a post card to the Bureau of Home Economics and ask for a copy. What's the number, Ruth?

VAN DEMAN:

The number isn't necessary. We have only one bulletin on men's shirts as part of our studies on cotton fabrics.

KADDERLY:

Very well then. The new bulletin "Cotton Shirts for Men and Boys" - a 16-page, illustrated bulletin packed with information on fabrics, workmanship, and materials. Just send a card to the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. and ask for the cotton shirt bulletin.